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Comparing elected mayors

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to compare the office of directly elected mayor in England, Germany and the USA. Proposing and applying a conceptual model of government, governance and allegiance, it assesses the leadership role of the elected mayor in the three countries.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample of mayors in each country over a period of 11 years. These formed part of the authors' continuing research into local leadership and political management, which has also included interviews with ex-mayors, elected representatives and senior officials.

Findings – The operation and success of the elected mayor in specific countries is influenced by formal variables (e.g. state constitutions, formal requirements) and informal relationships (e.g. with officials), represented in the distinction between structure and agency. The role of the individual mayor also varied in the light of local party affiliations. The paper considers the impact of these variables on the government, governance and allegiance functions of the elected mayor.

Research limitations/implications – In providing an analytical framework and in the discussion of original research, a basis is provided for the further study of the office of elected mayor in different national contexts. This is likely to prove valuable as the future of sub-national government is subject to continuity scrutiny.

Practical implications – The adoption and growth of the elected mayoral system may be considered as an example of lesson drawing. This has both positive and negative implications. Positively, much can be learned from comparative experience. Mayoral systems have resulted in quicker decision making. The mayor provides a very visible form of local leadership and accountability. However, dangers lie in the over-concentration of powers in the office of mayor and, in England especially, the failure of the mayoral system to enhance public engagement in local government.

Originality/value – The discussion will be of value to practitioners, policy-makers and academic researchers who are concerned with the future of the elected local state and its office holders.

Keywords Local government, Elections, Employees, England, Germany, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The office of elected executive mayor has increasingly become a feature of European local government (Schaap and Ringeling, 2003; Denters and Rose, 2005). It has been introduced or extended in several countries, in more or less conscious imitation of long-standing American practice. In England and Wales, the issue has transcended party political boundaries. For example, the senior Conservative Michael Heseltine proposed introducing elected mayors in England in 1991; the Labour Government elected in 1997 legislated in 2000 to enable local authorities to adopt the office; and in 2005 the Labour Party won a third term in office on a manifesto which included the commitment to: "... explore giving people a more direct opportunity to express a view about whether they would like to have a directly elected mayor. We will also consult with city councils on the powers needed for a new generation of city mayors" (Labour Party, 2005, p. 107).

Elsewhere in Europe, the North German *Länder* originally adopted a bifurcated system involving political leadership by a mayor (*Bürgermeister*) elected by the council, coupled with an appointed chief executive (*Gemeindedirektor*), a system known as the *Doppelspitze* (“twin peaks”) This system was developed during the British Occupation of Northern Germany after the Second World War in deliberate imitation of the then British practice of dividing local government leadership between the mayor or chairman of the council and its clerk. In 1994 the *Landtag* of Nordrhein-Westfalen voted to replace the *Doppelspitze* with elected mayors. Most other Northern *Länder* have followed suit, resulting in elected mayors leading local authorities in much of the German Federal Republic.

This paper seeks to assess the effects of these reforms on local leadership. It does this through analysis of primary interviews with elected mayors in England[1], the USA[2] and the Federal Republic of Germany[3]: countries with contrasting local government structures, political cultures and federal/unitary systems. Based on this comparison, a model (Figure 1) is proposed for developing the analysis of the elected mayoralty. Supplementary information drawn from secondary Greek sources has also been consulted to provide a perspective on possible future directions for research.

The analysis of the nine cells deriving from Figure 1 explores the roles of, and influences upon, the development of elected mayors in England, the *Land* Nordrhein-Westfalen in Germany (NRW), Western New York, USA (WNY) and Greece. In the first three areas, the analysis is based on interviews with elected mayors and local government officials carried out by the authors between 1994 and 2005. Alongside the established sociological distinctions between manifest and latent functions and agency and structure, the analytical framework uses the concept of “influence” across the matrix, together with an examination of the effects of formal and informal structures, and the active role of agents. A further distinction is drawn between the collective influences of agents (including the local council, local government officials and political parties) and the individual

Institutions:	Constitutional (Manifest) Legislation, Council constitution Standing Orders	Informal (Latent) Relations with council, parties, Chief Officer, other officers	Individual (Charismatic) Personal attributes, experience, background
Roles:			
Governmental	A1 Policy, budget, vetoes, appointments, personnel	A2 Relations with parties, backbenchers, CEO, Chief Officers	A3 Articulate, negotiate, dominate, experience?
Governance	B1 Representation, outside memberships, decentralised structures	B2 Relations with lobbies, interests, other levels of government	B3 Reticulist abilities/skills, established networks
Allegiance	C1 Term of office, formal relation to council, recall/dismissal	C2 Relations with outside parties, lobbies, electorate, dangers of clientelism/corruption	C3 Approachable, accessible?

Figure 1.
Analytical grid: elected
mayors

influences of the mayors' own background, personality and activity in office. For the analysis of roles in the vertical columns of the matrix, we have used the three leadership roles identified by Elcock (2001): government, governance and allegiance.

We now proceed to discuss the interview and related findings as they relate to each of the cells in the matrix of Figure 1. Its horizontal axes refer to the formal and informal dimensions of the mayoral office. These indicate differing influences upon the mayors' conduct of their office: first, by formal powers and functions defined within constitutions, legislation and regulation; secondly, by less formal but nonetheless powerful constraints and influences such as local political parties; and, thirdly, by the influence of mayors' individual characteristics including their personalities, experiences and education.

The vertical axes define the main roles that mayors must perform: first, the government role, including policy-making and co-ordination within the local authority itself; secondly, the governance role, including mayoral relationships with other local organisations and links to national and sub-national government; and, thirdly, the allegiance role, defined by the mayors' need to secure the survival of the office and their retention thereof (See Elcock, 2001).

Analysis

The following discussion and analysis is structured in accordance with the nine cells defined in Figure 1. This is followed by some reflections on the analysis and overall conclusions.

Governmental functions: formal and constitutional (A1)

Reform of the constitutional position of local mayors does not always produce the intended results. The process by which elected mayors have been adopted is related to the prevalence of the office in each country. In England, elected mayors were offered as two of three possible structures of elected leadership, with the result that the overwhelming majority of councils opted for the third option, the leader and cabinet structure as the one that offered least radical departure from the former committee structure. Several of the authorities where mayoral referenda have been held (and the mayoral option adopted) had recently suffered major crises in their local government, or contained significant pockets of dissatisfaction with long periods of one-party rule. Specifically, the local electorate "...sometimes demanded the mayoral option in order to express their dissatisfaction with local Labour Party machines" (John, 2004, p. 51). After the referenda had been held, the first mayoral elections often resulted in the defeat of the governing party's candidate, even in areas that had previously long been dominated electorally by Labour. Consequently, the national Labour leadership began to lose interest in the mayoral agenda.

In Germany, by contrast, elected mayors have been adopted throughout most of the country as a result of decisions by Land Governments to require their primary local authorities to adopt elected executive mayors. For example in 1994 the *Landtag* of Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) required its local authorities to establish elected mayors in place of the former bifurcated *Doppelspitze* system by 1999. In the USA, the 50 State Constitutions offered local governments choices about whether they established weak or strong mayors, city managers or other forms of government such as the commission

but in New York State the overwhelming majority of local governments had adopted the weak mayor-strong council form, with mayors being given varying degrees of control over officer appointments.

In Greece, executive mayors were a long-standing feature of local governments, dating back before the creation of the first independent Greek state in 1830, but the central government had striven for more than a century to reduce their power by reorganising local government structures. The first such reorganisation, under Eleftherios Venizelos in 1912, fragmented the structure of local government in order to reduce the mayors' powers. A second reorganisation, the Kapodistrias Reform of the late 1990s, fragmented local authorities' powers by creating multi-level government, while enlarging the primary local government units and reducing their numbers by a factor of nearly six. However, the mayors and their clientelist networks survived all these changes with their influence largely intact (Chondroleou *et al.*, 2005).

National and state constitutions also govern the relationships between mayors and their councils. In England, the new Overview and Scrutiny function for non-executive "backbench" local councillors was created by the same legislation that offered local authorities the chance to adopt elected mayors. However, the success of Overview and Scrutiny has been patchy (Ashworth and Snape, 2005). One English mayoral respondent complained that "at present it's just mayor-bashing", although others claimed to find scrutiny helpful. In other countries, there are formal rules determining the relations between the mayor and the council, including the mayor's right to veto council decisions in the USA. An enhanced council majority may in turn override the mayoral veto.

All the mayors are required to present annual budgets to their councils, which have the opportunity to scrutinise and then accept, amend or defeat them. In US local governments, the mayor can veto the council's decisions, after which the council can in turn override the mayor's veto by an enhanced majority. Only American local governments can increase budgets and add items to them. The extent to which this happens again varies widely. One English elected mayor had his first budget rejected, while a former mayor of Buffalo NY had his budget rejected on several occasions by the common council.

Two lessons are evident here. The first is that if a national or state government wishes to ensure that a desired reform be implemented, it must compel local authorities within its jurisdiction by law to adopt it. The second is that even if this is done, by whatever means, the results will not always be what the national or state government either expects or desires. One reason for this is the influence of informal or latent but nonetheless powerful influences on the offices and their incumbents.

Governmental functions: latency, agency and informal process (A2)

This cell is primarily concerned with relationships. The relationship between the mayor and his Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or other principal officer, together with relationships with chief officers and department heads, is crucial. In WNY, there was a strong assertion of the policy/administration divide, although one former mayor thought that the council's officers needed to be reminded of this from time-to-time. However, his administrator declared firmly, "(the mayor) is the executive officer, I am the fiscal officer". All the mayors interviewed in WNY saw themselves as the local executive and several declared that even where the mayor was formally weak, he or

she had had to become strong, taking overall control of policy and administration in order to secure effective local government.

In Germany, by contrast, there is a tradition that professional officials with overt party loyalties occupy the most senior administrative posts. Under the *Doppelspitze* in NRW, former *Gemeindedirektoren* accepted that when control of their councils changed hands, another *Direktor* loyal to the new controlling party would replace them. This stands in sharp contrast with the British tradition that officers are required to be apolitical and must advise councillors irrespective of party. This British tradition of the political and administrative divide is by international standards peculiarly strong (Campbell, 1983).

One English mayor had replaced his chief executive officer with a managing director who would have no policy responsibility but who would be responsible for service delivery. Another declared of the CEO "my role is policy and political, his role is operational". A third mayor claimed to be a manager rather than a politician, but he also claimed to be giving his council political direction, said to be previously lacking. In NRW, one former CEO reported tension between the administration and the council – between expertise and politics. The NRW respondents, especially the *Direktoren*, also expressed a more widespread concern that the new elected mayors might not possess sufficient expertise to perform their roles effectively.

In Greece, there was less concern with managerial issues, as New Public Management (NPM) issues of effectiveness, efficiency and economy had yet to penetrate most of the small local authorities that govern much of the country. Hence, mayors are more concerned with maintaining their relations with other local organisations and the central ministries, notably their clients.

The English mayors laid stress on their personal powers of decision. Most also claimed that this had led to quicker decision-making. All the mayors interviewed claimed to be in frequent formal and even more frequent informal contact with their chief officers and department heads. Committees were generally regarded as unimportant; their importance having declined significantly since the mayoral form had been adopted in English authorities, while they perform only minor roles in American and German local governments.

Mayors also claim to have improved co-ordination within their authorities and to have played a major role in doing so. One English mayor spoke of the need to "counteract the silo mentality". Another said that "co-ordination is better but it's still pretty poor". Mayors tended to co-ordinate their councils' administration through frequent informal meetings and telephone calls with the departmental heads, as well as by setting out clear strategic directions that all those working in the authority were expected to follow.

The relation between mayors and their councils can be significantly affected by the nature of local party politics. The English mayors interviewed included an independent whose victory had been unexpected: his first budget was subsequently rejected by the council, but he went on to build a consensus with councillors after that defeat, to ensure that his later budgets were adopted. No mayor reported consistent deadlock with the council, even in an area where the mayor and the majority of councillors were from different parties. The one English mayor who was from the same party as the council's majority party group said that this did not necessarily make relations with them easier, because some councillors were still "in denial" of his enhanced executive role. In WNY,

councils and mayors were formally non-partisan but party politics were nonetheless an important influence on the mayor's relations with his or her council.

The relationships between mayors and councils point to changing dynamics of control within mayoral authorities. This is also mirrored in the changing relationship between the mayoral council and central government, where new patterns of regulation – the “regulatory hybrids” referred to by Hood *et al.* (1999), p. 291) – are likely to arise alongside growth of the powerful office of mayor. However, this last will be to a degree determined by the mayor's own personality and capabilities.

Governmental functions: individuality, background, experience and charisma (A3)

Leach has noted, in relation to English mayors, that they stand for office “...on the basis of a personal statement. For party-affiliated mayors that statement will no doubt have been discussed with the local party, but ultimately it is the mayor's manifesto, not the local party's” (Leach, 2004, p. 83).

This is an important insight into the individual nature of mayoral leadership. The English and American interviews produced several examples of individuals who had defied and defeated the established party machines. They were often local people, stressing their local credentials. In one English town subject to mayoral election in 2005, there was the reassertion of the power of the non-affiliated individual who, after gaining victory only narrowly in 2002, was swept back to power with a large majority, demonstrating that a role exists for the hardworking novice. In contrast, mayors who were members of political parties, as were all the German subjects, had risen to their posts by gaining seniority and eminence in their parties. Their rise to office had been the climax of work in the service of their parties, holding party office, campaigning at elections and attending party meetings. However, one partisan mayor in England had gained the office after a crisis over corruption had resulted in some of the existing council leaders being imprisoned or disqualified from office. As a result, he rose from being elected to the council to becoming elected mayor in less than three years. Party membership was also important for the careers of Greek mayors, because the party is an important conduit for their networking with the central government and other local governments.

The backgrounds and careers from which the mayors had been drawn varied widely, confirming that political leaders are *sui generis*; they emerge from many quarters, often achieve their offices unexpectedly and cannot therefore be trained for their roles and functions before their election (Elcock, 2001), although training and support can be made available afterwards (Randle, 2004). Although some were established party politicians, others had won election against the major parties' candidates as they had promoted local issues or had conducted successful personal campaigns against the established parties as independent or non-party candidates, or as members of opposition parties.

Governance: visibility and accountability (B1)

Governance is crucially important for all elected mayors, as is also the case in the appointed mayoral system in France (John and Cole, 2000). One English mayor declared that he was a “visible, accountable figurehead” with whom all community organisations and individuals could liaise. Another regarded his ambassadorial role as his “*raison d'être*”. A WNY mayor had visited China and Canada to seek investment in

his small city. He declared, "I am a missionary for Jamestown". Many mayors regarded relations with the business community as crucially important.

In Germany, an important aspect of intergovernmental relations to which all mayors attached importance was the need for their authorities' actions and accounts to be approved by the next highest tier authority: *Kreise*, or in the case of *Kreisfreie Städte*, the *Land* Government. Such supervision is largely absent in the other three countries, although Greek mayors are subject to a degree of scrutiny by the prefecture (Nomos) councils and the Prefects themselves. In the USA, by contrast, government is highly fragmented, with each tier of government enjoying its own rights and duties, as defined by the State Constitution.

A particular indicator of mayors' executive relations with community organisations, especially local businesses, is the extent to which a local government's services are contracted out to council-owned or private companies, or voluntary agencies. This is of particular interest in England, where between 1980 and 1997 an increasing range of local authority services was made subject to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), under which local authorities were required by law to put defined services out to tender by private businesses, in competition with their own direct labour organisations. This resulted in concerted attempts by local councillors, their trades unions and staff to increase their services' efficiency in order to defeat rival tenders from outside companies. With a change of central government, CCT was replaced by a best value requirement, under which councils must demonstrate that they have sought good value in their service provision but they are no longer required to put the services out to competitive tender.

In none of the other three countries has such compulsion been attempted. In Germany, functions may be contracted out but usually to council-owned companies or other local publicly owned institutions such as the *Sparkassen*. One NRW mayor described this as "privatisation – but not really!" Marketisation has increased in recent years in attempts to reduce expenditure as the Federal Republic's economy has become increasingly stagnant and depressed after the reunification with the former DDR in 1991. In WNY, arrangements vary widely, with local governments making their own distinctive arrangements either for in-house service provision or contracting their functions out, usually to local companies. Again, the way such policies develop depends on the other, less formal pressures on mayors, especially on the extent to which local networks of influence both influence the mayor's policies and enable him or her to communicate and negotiate with other local agencies.

Governance: latency, process and agents (B2)

Successful mayoral authorities depend upon effective networks of governance with a range of other agents. Indeed, the current English system of local Comprehensive Performance Measurement brings with it the expectation of partnership working. Mayors saw the development of partnerships with local businesses and community groups, including close involvement in their areas' Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), as a vital part of their roles. They also highly valued area management initiatives within their authorities as means of encouraging public involvement by bringing local government closer to their communities. The need for area management arises in part from the very large size of English local authorities by international standards (Wilson, 2005), in consequence of which few, if any, English local authorities can be regarded as

community governments. All the English respondents attached great importance to their links with other local governments, the higher tiers of government, the business community and the trades unions, as well as the voluntary sector.

In the fragmented American system, maintaining relations with other elected or appointed public bodies (notably, School Boards and special district authorities) is a major preoccupation for mayors, and was not always easy. Service provision is often shared among several small local governments to achieve economies of scale. In "rustbelt" areas they also combine to create local economic regeneration agencies, to which several WNY respondents attached considerable importance. One WNY mayor reported continuing difficulties with the local School Board, which he regarded as inefficient and bureaucratic. Another WNY mayor declared that she talked often to the local School Board but stayed out of their frequent controversies. Relations with the County Executive were reported by several mayors as being at various times good, poor and difficult.

Greek mayors' external relations are dominated by clientelistic networks operating through political parties that have a strong role in controlling them and their local networks. Local authorities in economically deprived areas have been allowed to set up Local Development Companies (LDCs), arm's length organisations whose purpose is to bring about economic development by employing staff and using methods which would not be possible for a public authority accountable to the electorate. LDCs have been partially successful but some have become subject to corruption, with the result that the central government has now restricted the purposes for which they may be created (Chondroleou *et al.*, 2003, 2005).

In both England and Germany, relations with the European Union (EU) in Brussels have become increasingly important. Mayors may take part in meetings with EU officials. The NRW mayors had a particular European preoccupation, because part of NRW is involved in a Euregion embracing communities on both sides of the German-Dutch border which have increasingly developed cultural and co-operative links. Several former CEOs mentioned the importance of meeting colleagues from other EU regions with which they had common interests. The extent to which such co-operative links develop and are useful depends on the mayors' personalities and attributes.

Governance: mayors as individuals and as agents (B3)

Mayors must conduct individual relations with local government, business and voluntary agency leaders, politicians at other levels of government and individual citizens. The English respondents were very anxious to emphasise that they dealt with large numbers of individual problems and complaints. One reported getting between 20 and 30 e-mails a day from individuals and declared that "personal contact is important – the individual touch is appreciated". Another spoke of having to work on both the macro and the micro levels. He claimed that "I consult the public and meet them more . . . the public is hugely involved". However, he cautioned that "the public needs actually to see that getting involved does lead to a change in their circumstances and make a real impact on their lives".

The WNY mayors likewise stressed the importance of their contacts with individual citizens, especially where they had been motivated to stand for the office by colleagues or fellow business people. This occurred because of poor decisions or corrupt actions

by their predecessors, such as failure to regenerate the downtown area or poor decision-making by the Development Director, which had led to their predecessors' defeat by these respondents. However, they tended to emphasise their links with the business communities and their parties, rather than with individuals alone. One declared "I build consensus". Also, American councils allow members of the public to raise any issue they choose without prior notice – the "public portion" – a privilege that is freely used and can produce vigorous controversy at meetings. The German mayors were more inclined to stress their ambassadorial roles, emphasising their relations with local charities, sports clubs and churches, among others. Clientelist relations with the ministries, other local authorities and private companies were the main preoccupations of the Greek mayors.

Allegiance: formality and structure (C1)

In formal terms, the English mayors are peculiarly vulnerable because their offices can be abolished by local referendum. One has already faced this threat. Furthermore, in one of the four English mayoral elections in May 2005, the victorious candidate campaigned on the platform of a future referendum on maintaining his office. Mayors in the other countries are protected from the abolition of their offices by the relevant constitution, state or national laws. They have to fight for office, but are not vulnerable to abolition of the office itself.

In office, the ethical conduct of English mayors, along with that of councillors and officers, is subject to scrutiny by a national Standards Board, again an institution that does not exist in the same form elsewhere, although German councils are subject to scrutiny by higher tier authorities. In WNY, public accountability is guaranteed by short terms of office and frequent elections. Most mayors and councilmen enjoy only a two-year term of office, although increasing numbers of local governments are increasing their mayoral terms to four years, usually subject to a prohibition against seeking re-election more than once, the same rule that has applied to the US President since 1948. In Greece, there have been repeated attempts to curb mayors' powers and their clientelistic relations but this central pressure has had at most limited success. In all four countries, informal processes of allegiance influence the way mayors develop their offices and seek to ensure that they retain them.

Allegiance: informality and latency, process and agents (C2)

In any office with a high degree of individual authority, there is a danger that clientelist or otherwise corrupt relations may develop. One English mayor warned of the possibility that a power-hungry individual might in future win an election. Copus has noted that opposition to the concept of elected executive mayor is partly based "...in concerns of wrongdoing and corruption" (Copus, 2004, p. 580). Apart from actual opportunities for personal advantage as a result of elected office, there is a larger theoretical and political question of how the principal (the public or its representatives) controls the agent (the executive and the decision-maker) (see Hood, 1998, p. 29). Indeed, in this formulation, the mayor straddles the boundary between principal and agent. While there is no evidence that this fear is yet justified in the English context, its mayoral system does contain relatively few checks on the power of the mayor.

Overall, relations with political parties are always important. An independent or non-party mayor usually faces an uncertain future. One such American mayor defeated

both parties when she won election but was roundly defeated by her Republican opponent only two years later. The support of a party will considerably increase a mayor's chances of political survival. In NRW mayors were also concerned to maintain relations with the minority parties on their councils and to try to govern by consensus, especially because the committees' memberships must be proportional to the party balance on the council.

Mayors also need to maintain effective contact with interest groups and the public in their communities. The English mayors laid heavy stress on their involvement in maintaining and increasing public interest and involvement in the government of their communities but there is as yet no independent evidence from America or anywhere else that they are likely to succeed in increasing public interest and involvement (Hambleton, 1994). In particular, there is little evidence that even the most charismatic personality will excite high public interest, unless he or she is elected or has to deal with a major local government crisis.

Allegiance: latency, individual and agent (C3)

Nonetheless, mayors attach great importance to maintaining their visibility in their communities, developing their contact with the public and retaining their popularity with the citizenry. An English mayor said that "the elected mayor focuses attention on one individual". The WNY mayors stressed the importance of being well known in their communities, often as a result of their long residence and work within the local area. Mayors in all countries stressed their local origins and careers. They sought to give citizens what they wanted and needed and used various means to maintain contact with them. One English mayor writes a weekly column in his local newspaper; another issues consultative policy papers and a third holds meetings in various parts of the authority's area.

The WNY mayors usually need to maintain the support of their parties, especially given their need to raise large sums of money to fight elections there, although raising more money than the opponent is no guarantee of electoral success. The German mayors too stressed the need to maintain both public support and that of their parties, while the main individual preoccupation of the Greek mayors is to maintain relations with their parties and client groups.

Conclusions

The analytical grid presented in Figure 1 is an attempt to make it possible to elucidate the differences and similarities in the way the office of mayor has developed in different countries. It enables the researcher to compare systematically the roles played by elected mayors in different countries and the formal, informal and personal influence that shape both their roles and their performance in them. It therefore permits the observer to identify and elaborate the significant features of the office of mayor in different contexts (both within and between countries) and also to elucidate lessons that may be helpful to countries that are considering adopting the office or that need to review its development: such a review is likely to be part of current government thinking in England and Wales on the future of community and local government. The analytical grid may also be of value to other researchers who are developing this work further. On the basis of our analysis, we would offer two sets of conclusions at this stage.

The first relate to Richard Rose's conception of lesson drawing, especially hybridisation and synthesis (Rose, 1993). This is evident where one country has introduced the office of elected executive mayor by following consciously the examples of one or more other countries. After the Second World War, the German elected *Bürgermeister* was modelled on American practice but based also on local tradition in Southern Germany. It has now been adopted by most Northern *Länder* to replace the *Doppelspitze*, which was itself modelled on British practice. Because the *Land* legislatures have compelled their primary local governments to adopt elected mayors, they are now almost universal, whereas the Labour administration in England has (so far) offered elected mayors only as an option, with the result that few local authorities in England have adopted the system. Among existing councillors and council Leaders, there was vigorous opposition to the change (Beecham, 1996; Doyle, 1996; Elcock, 1998). The evidence from our interviews, as analysed using the matrix, also demonstrates that in all the countries studied individual mayors have developed the office in their own ways, as well as its evolution being influenced by national and local laws, traditions and practices.

The second set of conclusions draws specific lessons from the results of the interviews. Three positive benefits can be identified:

- (1) The focus of decision-making on the individual mayor has resulted in quicker decisions and fewer delays in the internal management of local governments.
- (2) Co-ordination has also been improved because department heads must keep the mayor fully informed and discuss their policies and decisions with him or her. Mayors are responsible for providing strategic direction to their authorities' staff.
- (3) The mayor provides a visible, accountable focal point for other local actors, including neighbouring local governments, businesses and voluntary agencies. He or she also provides a visible, accessible target for local comments and complaints: research by the New Local Government Network has demonstrated that elected mayors in England enjoy much higher public recognition than conventional council leaders (Randle, 2004).

As suggested elsewhere, the English mayoral system "...has begun to exhibit some of the features anticipated by its supporters: clear local leadership, a concentration on strategic issues, an engagement with the wider governance role, an ability to cut through ossified decision-making processes and, to some extent, a success in working across party-political boundaries" (Fenwick and Elcock, 2005, p. 64).

However, the respondents identified at least two possible dangers inherent in adopting elected mayors:

- (1) Individual mayors may become corrupt, or engage in abuses of power. Lord Acton's over-quoted dictum that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is relevant here. This is a major issue in Greece and is seen as a possible danger in all circumstances of possibly unchecked individual authority.
- (2) Although (especially in England) elected mayors have hoped they would increase public interest and involvement in their local government, there is no

evidence from other countries that they are likely to succeed in achieving this aspiration (see Hambleton, 1994).

The powerful elected executive mayor is increasingly perceived, in different national contexts, as a solution to the demands for effective local leadership and democratic renewal. It may be propelled along as part of an overall “modernisation” of public service management, despite the ambiguities and problems of that term (see, e.g. Hood, 1998, pp. 195-196). In England, extending the office of elected mayor, after its uncertain start in 2002, is now firmly back on the political agenda. In drawing lessons, the authors of reform have much to learn from the experience of Germany and the USA. The role of the individual mayor, the local party, the formal structure of government, and the wider pattern of local governance can clearly be expected to impact very differently in different countries. Further primary research, for instance in the Southern European context of Greece or the Northern European setting of Norway, will assist in understanding the overall value of comparing mayors.

Notes

1. The interviews with English mayors were carried out as part of the authors' study of the new political management arrangements in local government (2002-2005). This comprised a questionnaire survey and interviews with local councillors in four local authorities and, for the purposes of this paper, interviews with five of the eleven English mayors elected in 2002.
2. The initial interviews with American mayors were carried out in 1994. Four elected mayors, one ex-mayor and three local officials (Village Administrator, Ombudsman and Personnel Director and a Director of Fiscal Affairs) were interviewed. A further interview with an elected mayor (successor to earlier interviewee) was conducted in 1997.
3. The interviews with German mayors were carried out in 1997. Three elected mayors (*Bürgermeister*) were interviewed, plus a further four serving or recently retired chief officers (*Gemeindedirektoren*).

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